

## Once home-based, now offices galore

by Kevin J. Shay | Staff Writer

Many big companies, especially high-technology ones, started in someone's home. Among those was Google, the Mountain View, Calif., search engine giant.

Google began in 1996 as a research project by Stanford University doctoral students Larry Page and Sergey Brin, who created a new type of search engine that ranked Web sites according to links to them from other relevant Web pages. After incorporating the company in 1998 when it was operated out of a friend's garage, Google soon moved to a Silicon Valley office.

Google now has more than 12,000 employees, and its revenue last year reached \$10.6 billion. The stock price has risen more than 400 percent since the company went public in 2004 and was above \$500 this week.

Rudy Lewis, president of the National Association of Home Based Businesses in Owings Mills, said he didn't know of any former home-based company in Maryland that has grown as much as Google. But he expected some big ones to come out of Maryland in the near future.

"Home-based businesses are just starting to access venture capital," said Lewis, a business consultant and developer who has lived in Maryland for about four decades.

"Some are starting to find angel investors and then later move to venture capital firms. I expect to see some Maryland home businesses growing into Wall Street businesses."

Passion Parties Inc., Las Vegas supplier of sensual products such as lotions, has grown to more than 28,000 largely home-based consultants across the nation since forming in 1994. Some 170 consultants, who organize events along the lines of Tupperware parties only with different products, are based in Maryland, with two of those "high-achieving executive directors," said Alissa Kelly, a company spokeswoman.

**GiraMondo Associates LLC, a wine education and consulting business, is among those that have moved from home offices to a Maryland business incubator.**

**GiraMondo's move to the Wheaton Business Innovation Center in November was the "best decision that I've made since I started my company," said Laurent Guinand, a native of Lyon, France, and president of the company.**

**The incubator has more space as well as conference rooms to meet with clients and contractors, so he no longer has to see people at a café near his home.**

**"I've been expanding," said Guinand, who started the company part-time in 2004, then turned it to full-time last year after working as a banker, consultant and promoter of the French wine industry. "The consulting business with wineries that want to sell in this region has been especially busy."**

**Besides a consulting and investing division with wineries, Guinand's company has a wine education division that organizes wine seminars, tastings and tours. He works with contractors now and hopes to add some employees by the end of the year.**

Network Referral Group Inc., which helps businesses grow through referrals made at various meetings, moved from founder Michael Weiner's home in Ellicott City to a Columbia office last year. The company now has four employees and is looking to add more, said Weiner, whom the SBA recently honored as Maryland's Home Based Business Champion for 2006.

Network Referral Group, which started in 2001 and has grown its membership to more than 1,000 in the mid-Atlantic region, is planning its 50th "summit" June 28 at the Columbia Hilton.

"We expect to have a record attendance of more than 650," Weiner said. "There is a tremendous diversity of exhibitors and tremendous energy at these summits. People walk out with many referrals."